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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000211

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PINS PINR PREL ASEC PTER ML

SUBJECT: TUAREG LEADER: FORGET THE ACCORDS, JUST GIVE US OUR GUYS BACK

REF: A. BAMAKO 00107

1B. BAMAKO 00141

1C. BAMAKO 00003

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On March 31 National Assembly Deputy and Tuareg leader Alghabass ag Intallah described the Algiers Accords as increasingly irrelevant; accused the Malian government of mistreating Tuareg rebel prisoners; and warned that restive Tuaregs in Kidal were on the point of capturing a handful of Malian soldiers of their own. Recent attempts by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and Tuareg leaders to visit captured rebels have been deflected by Malian officials, prompting both the ICRC and ag Intallah to wonder what the Malians are hiding and question why captured Tuaregs are in the custody of the General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) as opposed to regular military or judicial authorities. Ag Intallah said ethnic Arab militias constituted in January in northern Mali were bands of Arab smugglers operating under the command not of Malian army Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou but DGSE Col. Lamana ould Bdou, and said these militia units never engaged with rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga. Ag Intallah also questioned Malian and Algerian motivations regarding AQIM's use of northern Mali as a safe haven, and said President Amadou Toure personally forced him to rescind a request for the Ministers of Defense and Security to appear before the Assembly to answer questions on Mali's policy toward AQIM during the last National Assembly session. End Summary.

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Alghabass: The Quiet Tuareg  
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2.(C) At about 6 feet 6 inches tall in full Tuareg regalia and maybe 6 foot 4 without, Alghabass ag Intallah strikes a gangling yet imposing figure. This is due partly to his quiet countenance, and partly to what he symbolizes. As the middle son of Kidal's aged traditional leader, Alghabass represents the past and the future of Mali's ruling Tuareg hierarchy. No more than 35 years old, Alghabass also represents the growing numbers of restive Tuareg youth who, unemployed and without prospects, are testing the limits of Kidal's traditional governing structures and the modern Malian state's ability to maintain order. It is perhaps these contradictions - his conflicted status as the most capable yet second son of Kidal's ailing traditional Tuareg leader; his position as a senior but youthful elected official from Kidal; and his dual role as a quiet, level-headed advisor to both the Malian government and the Tuareg rebellion - that make Alghabass such a compelling, and credible, narrator for the northern region of Kidal.

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The Desertification of the Algiers Accords

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3.(C) On March 31 Alghabass told the Embassy that the 2006 Algiers Accords were rapidly sinking into the northern Malian sand. There has been no public discussion of the Algiers Accords or their implementation since Tuareg rebel groups disarmed in February. Alghabass indicated that no private discussions were on going either. "Military withdrawal, special units, development," said Alghabass, "no one is talking about it." He accused the Malian and Algerian governments of trying to "cover the Accords with sand" by declaring the implementation process complete and moving on. "They do not want to implement anything," observed Alghabass.

He then noted that the Malian military was still openly driving through Kidal in vehicles commandeered several months earlier from local Tuareg civilians and rebels. Instead of downgrading its military footprint as stipulated by the Accords, Alghabass said Mali was fortifying its positions in the north and cited as evidence Mali's recent decision to designate Kidal as a separate military district. Kidal was previously part of the First military region headquartered in Gao.

4.(C) Alghabass said Tuaregs harbored no illusions about Mali's commitment to reducing its military footprint in the north or constituting mixed military units and were no longer thinking about portions of the Accords dealing with development and the "economic reinsertion" of former rebels. Alghabass downplayed concerns over the exclusion of other Tuareg groups from the nine-person Algiers Accords steering committee - the three Tuareg members of this committee are all Ifoghas - by claiming that Taghat Melet and Idnane

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Tuaregs had chosen to follow their own, parallel peace process. Taghat Melet and Idnane Tuareg rebel groups disarmed separately from the primarily Ifoghas dominated Alliance for Democracy and Change's (ADC) February 17 disarmament ceremony (Ref. A).

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**Tuareg Rebel Prisoners**  
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5.(C) Alghabass said the most pressing - and potentially explosive - issue for Kidal Tuaregs was no longer the implementation of the Accords but the continued detention of as many as 23 suspected Tuareg rebels captured by Malian forces in January and February 2009. While some of these individuals are certainly former rebels, Alghabass claimed others were Tuareg civilians picked up by Malian military patrols simply because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. "People can talk about reconciliation," said Alghabass of the peace process in the north, "but without liberation, there will be no reconciliation." Alghabass warned that restive Tuareg youth could capture 30 Malian soldiers "at any moment" to speed the release of the Tuaregs currently imprisoned in Bamako, and described the situation as a "war of nerves" between Tuaregs and those holding the prisoners.

6.(C) Malian officials have refused repeated requests by Alghabass and other Tuareg leaders to visit these prisoners. Alghabass said his only entry point to these prisoners was through DGSE Director, Col. Mamy Coulibaly, but that Col. Coulibaly had given him the run around for more than a month, telling Alghabass to first call one day, then the next, and then wait one week more. This week Col. Coulibaly told Alghabass he was traveling and referred the matter to Lt. Col. Didier Dacko, who subsequently instructed Alghabass to wait a few more days. "Why is this?" asked Alghabass in reference to both the involvement of the DGSE and his inability to get a straight answer from either Col. Coulibaly or Lt. Col. Dacko. "Where are these prisoners?"

7.(C) On March 4 the ICRC told the Embassy that it had also

been unable to visit Tuaregs captured in January and February. On April 1 the local ICRC delegate said the ICRC was "still a bit stuck on this issue" and equally uncertain of exactly how many Tuareg prisoners are in custody or just who is holding them. The ICRC described the question of who was responsible for the prisoners as "complicated" due to the apparent involvement of the DGSE (septel).

8.(C) Both Alghabass and another Tuareg contact in Bamako speculated that Malian authorities were refusing to grant access to the Tuareg prisoners to hide signs of abuse, and unwilling to release them for fear of what they will reveal about their confinement. Alghabass said the Tuareg prisoner who died on January 15, just one day after being transferred to Bamako, was beaten to death by the contingent of Malian soldiers, reportedly led by Col. Abderahmane ould Meydou, who captured him and seven other Tuaregs on January 12 in northern Mali. Two other Malian officials have reported that this prisoner succumbed not to illness, as previously claimed by the Malians, but wounds inflicted after his capture (Ref. B). No one, however, has provided evidence to support this contention. As a result, we are currently unable to discern the accuracy of this claim.

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Arab Militias Not Really Militias  
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9.(C) There has been considerable confusion over the role and composition of ethnic Arab militias in northern Mali since they materialized in January. Some have reported that the militias were under the command of Malian army Col. ould Meydou and helped oust rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga from northern Mali in early February. Alghabass said the Arab militias are led not by Col. ould Meydou but by DGSE Col. Lamana, and specified that these militias never actually engaged with Bahanga's followers. According to Alghabass, a combination of regular army forces led by Col. ould Meydou and Imghad Tuareg paramilitary units led by Col. Elhedj Gamou forced Bahanga from northern Mali. Alghabass said Col. ould Meydou's regular army units were composed primarily of ethnic Arab and Tuareg enlisted men as opposed to newly constituted militia members. In contrast, Alghabass described Col. Lamana's Arab militias as nothing more than bands of Arab smugglers and bandits now based in the northern frontier town of In-Khalil. Col. Lamana told the Embassy he was forming Arab militias in December 2008 (Ref. C).

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Mali and AQIM  
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10.(C) Alghabass briefly acknowledged the recent arrests of three Tuaregs allegedly implicated in the January 22 kidnapping of four European tourists. He placed much of the blame for the current round of hostage taking by AQIM on what he described as Mali and Algeria's unwillingness to confront AQIM, and accused Mali of using AQIM as an excuse for harassing local Tuareg populations. Alghabass said he suspected there was some complicity on the part of the Malian government which enabled AQIM to remain in northern Mali for so long. "It wouldn't be hard," he said, "for Mali or Algeria to fight AQIM."

11.(C) Alghabass said he tried, during the last National Assembly session, to compel the Ministers of Defense and Security to appear before the Assembly to answer questions about Mali's efforts to combat AQIM but that President Toure personally instructed Alghabass to withdraw this request. Alghabass complied.

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Comment: Turbulence Ahead  
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12.(C) Alghabass was pessimistic about the future prospects of the Algiers Accords, at times openly conflating the agreement with the 1991 Tamanrasset Accords - a nearly identical never-implemented peace deal, also negotiated with Algerian mediation. Alghabass indicated that Ibrahim Bahanga's relocation to Libya may have improved stability somewhat, but that there are still many Tuareg rebels in the north ready to restart hostilities against the Malian military. The prolonged detention of Tuareg prisoners under unclear circumstances in Bamako may be enough to spark some to action. Either way, the mixture of Tuareg prisoners held incommunicado in Bamako, armed but unhappy former rebels in the north, an expanded military presence around Kidal, newly empowered bands of Arab traffickers, and pro-government Tuareg paramilitary units with nothing much to do is not a winning combination.

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